

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“ . . . This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5)

There once was a person who fed a dog food from the dining room table. On a certain day, this person scolded the dog for wanting to leap up for scraps. When asked why, the person responded that they only feed the dog when it sits. Someone in the crowd responded that the dog may not know this is what is expected of it since the dog is an irrational creature. Rather quickly, the upset individual responded that the dog was not irrational. I begin with this story for it leads us to draw two conclusions. Either this dog, or all dogs, are now deemed rational creatures with as much self-awareness as we possess or, more than likely, the individual never truly heard the statement. They listened, but they never heard.

We should not fault the individual for not hearing the statement in much the same way as we should be very careful before faulting the Jewish people of Antioch whom we read about today. Remember, one finger pointing at them means three pointing back at us. Consider the various groups present that day whom Saints Paul and Barnabas have presented with a new teaching. This new way professes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. For some, driven by their need for authority or power, the idea of hearing this new teaching is one bridge too far. For others, the self-styled intellectuals, they will not hear for this new way consists of fanciful ideas proposed by uneducated men. And finally, there would be those who are too concerned with just trying to secure the means to live another day. These do not have the time to hear those preaching. As the old saying goes; “there are bigger fish in the ocean” which draws their pursuits. Many in these various groups would not openly oppose the teaching of the saints. Nor would they oppose Paul and Barnabas going to the Gentiles. I think they were, for Saints Paul and Barnabas, the living equivalent of today’s voicemail message: “I’m sorry; the person you are trying to reach is disconnected.”

I find myself wondering if I too am disconnected and therefore cannot hear the words that God is speaking to me right now. To answer this, I must re-examine my approach to prayer. We have all been taught, I would presume, that prayer is a conversation between God and the person. As all conversations go, this needs to be a dialogue; not solely a monologue. Yet for it to be a dialogue, I must understand that I need to listen. For in listening, then I can open myself to hearing what God is saying. My family, please understand that prayer is a language. It is God’s language. We will be unable to understand it, much less speak it, unless we first make a concerted effort to hear it. Yes, to hear the language of God, the language of intimate prayer, I must be quiet and listen. But am I willing to do this? Are any of us really willing to do this? For to hear the voice of God may challenge my preconceived beliefs, thoughts, and notions. It may force me to admit that the knowledge of the Catholic Church is deeper, wiser, and more profound than my own. I just might have to admit that I have made and do make mistakes. Yes, to listen, hear, and reflect upon the language God speaks will appear intimidating and challenging, but if we want our relationship with Him to deepen, then it must be done. Or, we could sit comfortably at a table pontificating about how rational a dog is. The choice is ours to make.